

3

Try. Poetry vol by.

THE
SEA - FIGHT;
AN
ELEGIAC POEM.

[Price One Shilling and Six Pence.]



THE
SEA-FIGHT;

AN
ELEGIAC POEM,

FROM
HENRY to LAURA.

FOUNDED ON
AN ORIGINAL CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE PARTIES,
IN THE YEAR 1759.

WRITTEN AT SEA.

By CHARLES SHILLITO.

"GAUDENT SECURI NARRARE PERICULA NAUTÆ."
JUVENAL.

L O N D O N :
PRINTED FOR J. DODSLEY, PALL-MALL,
MDCCLXXIX.

INTRODUCTION.

THE office of poetry is to present different objects to the imagination; therefore it is divided into different species, which excite in us a variety of sensations and passions. As that part of it which we call *satyrical*, treats of the characters, sentiments, and affections of living objects, and strives, either by poignant expressions or ludicrous colouring, to dissipate such ridiculous customs, tastes, and manners as are predominant in different ages, and countries; so that part of it which we call *descriptive*, conveys to us a perception of the various combinations or forms that are displayed in the material universe.

The reader will determine whether the following little poem may be called *descriptive*; I shall content myself with informing him that it is founded on the following domestic fact.

The

The person distinguished by the fictitious name of Henry, was the son of a nobleman in Devonshire, who being upon a visit in a neighbouring village, was introduced to the daughter of an opulent farmer. A reciprocal affection was the result of repeated interviews; and they lived some little time amidst all the genuine transport of disinterested passion. At length Henry determined to give his hand in marriage to the beautiful Laura. This determination soon reached his father's ear, who, enraged at such a design, with a view to dissipate his passion, determined to send him to sea, in the service of his country.

It is necessary here to observe, that Henry had not yet declared his rank to his intended father-in-law; but had passed for a grazier in Cornwall, and to strengthen his scheme had always appeared in a rustic habit during his visits. His father's assiduity soon discovered this stratagem, and immediately put a scheme into execution of sending him on board, without giving him an opportunity to know who was the instrument of it. Accordingly, for this purpose, he procured a band of ruffians, who, disguised in seamen's habits, surprised our adventurous lover in his way to visit his beloved mistress: careless of his

remonstrances, they immediately forced him away, and lodged him on board some ship of war in the fleet, then lying in Plymouth Sound ; and it was soon after the defeat of Monsieur Conflans, off Quiberon Bay, that the letters which gave rise to the following poem were written.

In the different characters that compose this little piece, I have endeavoured to *paint Nature* ; how far the execution is adequate to the design, the candid critic will determine ; whom I must beg leave to refer to the following lines of Horace :

Verum ubi plura nitent in carmine, non ego paucis
Offendor maculis —————

HOR.

INTRODUCTION

remembrance they immediately forced him away, and lodged him on board some ship of war in the fleet, then lying in the great sound; and it was soon after the death of Monsieur Constant, of Guisnes, that the letters which gave rise to the following poem were written.

In the first part of a long conversation, the first part of the conversation was devoted to the subject of the poem, and the second part to the subject of the poem.

The first part of the conversation was devoted to the subject of the poem, and the second part to the subject of the poem.

The first part of the conversation was devoted to the subject of the poem, and the second part to the subject of the poem.

The first part of the conversation was devoted to the subject of the poem, and the second part to the subject of the poem.

The first part of the conversation was devoted to the subject of the poem, and the second part to the subject of the poem.

The first part of the conversation was devoted to the subject of the poem, and the second part to the subject of the poem.

The first part of the conversation was devoted to the subject of the poem, and the second part to the subject of the poem.

The first part of the conversation was devoted to the subject of the poem, and the second part to the subject of the poem.

The first part of the conversation was devoted to the subject of the poem, and the second part to the subject of the poem.

The first part of the conversation was devoted to the subject of the poem, and the second part to the subject of the poem.

The first part of the conversation was devoted to the subject of the poem, and the second part to the subject of the poem.

THE
SEA - FIGHT.

STILL roar, ye winds, ye dreadful storms, arise,
Ye white waves, still in wild confusion flow;
Still, ye rough billows, lash the sable skies,
Whilst HENRY breathes a history of woe!

Yet ah!—for LAURA the dire tale he tells,
Then stop thy rage, nor let the surges roll;
Cease, ye rude tempests, 'till the calm sea swells,
Fair as her form, unruffled as her soul!

Thy HENRY lives!—methinks at that strange tale

Thy bosom heaves with an uncertain sigh,

Thy lovely cheek betrays a crimson veil,

And tears of transport tremble in thine eye!

Methinks I hear my lovely maid reply,

“ Alas! must doubt still more terrific grow?

“ Tell me, O! quickly tell me ere I die,

“ Ye heav’nly powers, where dwells my HENRY now?

“ Since these poor eyes beheld the charmer last,

“ Four cruel moons have shed their silver beams;

“ For LAURA lives on pleasures that are past,

“ And kisses HENRY only in her dreams.

“ O say, is he still just, and kind, and good;

“ Does his strange absence cause unusual sighs;

“ Can love’s soft pangs create a briny flood,

“ Like that which ever flows in LAURA’S eyes?

“ Ah

“ Ah no !—the blissful thought is void, and vain !

“ Come quickly, death, and give thy welcome rest ;

“ For love his truest votary has slain !

“ Another LAURA lives in HENRY's breast !”

Cease thy soft 'plaint, and look for mightier woe :

By all the Gods, thou beauteous maid, I swear,
No fairer rivals has my LAURA now,

Than pale-ey'd grief, and comfortless despair.

Thou know'st, my lovely maid, ah hapless day !

When thy last note did these dear stanza's pour,

“ On wings of love, my HENRY, haste away,

“ At eve thy LAURA seeks the silent bower.

“ There, whilst we range 'midst all the bliss of love,

“ The conscious flow'rs will still new charms display ;

“ For thee I've lately prun'd the jess'mine grove ;

“ On wings of love, my HENRY, haste away.

“ Thy fav’rite lilies now disclose fresh charms,
 “ The doves have left their nest, and fought the spray ;
 “ Come, lovely youth, and bless these longing arms ;
 “ On wings of love, my HENRY, haste away.”

With transport I beheld the welcome prize ;
 How oft I read the love-fraught hist’ry o’er !
 How soon, equipp’d within my new disguise,
 I fled a peasant towards the heav’nly bower !

With haste I fled !—Ah ! mark the cruel tale
 That gives thy unavailing sorrows birth ;
 A savage troop beset me in the vale,
 And causeless fell’d me to the bounding earth !

On that green turf where last we careless play’d,
 Beneath the covert of our fav’rite oak,
 Ev’n there, sweet maid ! thy wounded lover laid,
 A new-fall’n victim from th’ oppressive stroke !

The little stream that gently murmur'd by,
 O'er which my LAURA oft' had smiling stood,
 Shew'd each close object in a Tyrian dye,
 And prov'd a channel for her HENRY's blood !

The crimson plant that once so sweetly spread
 Its blushing beauties o'er the rivulet's side,
 Ah wretched omen ! hung its tender head,
 The dewy tear of ev'ning dropt—and dy'd !

I call'd on all the pow'rs of Heav'n in vain ;
 In vain the murd'ers' pity I implor'd ;
 Then talk'd of justice, in no vulgar strain,
 And swore the peasant's garb conceal'd a Lord.

I quickly ran my am'rous hist'ry o'er,
 Describ'd my journey to the neighb'ring grove,
 That cruel guardians urg'd their hated pow'r,
 Which made me fly disguis'd to meet my love.

No tear of pity grac'd the ruffians' eye ;
 Alas ! my labour'd narrative was vain ;
 Lo ! as a wretch for murder doom'd to die,
 They seiz'd, and dragg'd me cross th' adjoining plain.

Three radiant suns thro' yon blue vault had fled,
 Ere yet I guess'd at my too cruel doom ;
 Soon as the fourth had left his wat'ry bed,
 They lodg'd me in a *Tender's* horrid gloom !

Infernal cell ! within thy dismal shade
 Stern misery still more terrific grew ;
 Where never wand'ring ray of day-light stray'd,
 I basely herded with the vulgar crew.

Here dire despair, and raging madness reign'd ;
 Here ling'ring sickness fed her cank'ring worm ;
 Keen agony his mighty sinews strain'd,
 And death stalk'd wild in ev'ry horrid form !

One wretch would echo loud his fruitless plaint ;
 Another su'd for Heav'n's peculiar care ;
 A third would deal a curse to ev'ry faint,
 'Till ev'ry oath kept time with ev'ry prayer.

Yet must the tale offend my LAURA's ear,
 The lengthen'd story would fresh pangs create :
 Enough, sweet maid, I fix its period here.—
 Now mark the remnant of thy HENRY's fate !

Nine genial days their radiant course had run,
 Ere yet a gentle ray of comfort flow'd :
 With joy I view'd the tenth descending sun,
 When fate releas'd me from my drear abode.

Slowly I climb'd the lofty vessel's side,
 Whilst Love and Glory held a doubtful pause ;
 Then—"guard my LAURA, pitying Heav'n," I cry'd,
 "For lo ! I'll perish in my country's cause !"

Within

Within my furious breast what conflicts strove !

First cruel Love would yield to tyrant War ;

Then tyrant War would yield to cruel Love ;

And this inexorable oath I swear :

“ By all the pow’rs in yon cœrulean sky,

“ For Liberty, *dear* Liberty, I’ll strive ;

“ For Albion, *dearer* Albion, will I die ;

“ For LAURA, *dearest* LAURA, would I live !”

Fair rose the winds, the face of ocean smil’d,

The swelling sails their snowy breasts expand ;

With joyful glee the sun-burnt heroes toil’d,

And soon the gallant vessel left the land !

Forth to the crowded beach a virgin-band

Repair’d, to take the last sad parting view ;

Each held a filken signal in her hand,

Then dropp’d a tear, and wav’d a fond adieu.

Lo ! here an aged father trembling stood,
 Who for an only son preferr'd his pray'rs,
 Then wildly gaz'd upon the distant flood,
 Beat his old breast, and shook his silver hairs !

No friend had I to urge the mutual flame ;
 No brother pity'd, and no sister sigh'd ;
 No guardian angel, for no LAURA came :
 And thus in sad soliloquy I cry'd :

“ How vain are joys within the human reach !
 “ Show me the man that floats on Fortune's wave ;
 “ Lo ! one short sun may view th' exulting wretch
 “ A morning monarch, and an evening slave !
 “ Was I not blest with wealth and fair renown ?
 “ Each earthly bliss, alas ! to me was given ;
 “ Ev'n thee, sweet maid ! I dar'd to call my own,
 “ The richest gift beneath yon arch of Heaven !

C

“ What

Lo !

“ What are the dangers of a raging sea ?

“ Fate can no more than take this vital breath ;

“ Ah ! LAURA, ev’n a thought of losing thee

“ Is worse than struggling in the arms of death !

“ Tho’ far—far absent from thy blooming charms,

“ Thy beauty yet shall swell my future themes ;

“ In thought each day I’ll clasp thee in my arms,

“ Each fable night I’ll seek thee in my dreams.

“ Whilst war prevails, and dreadful storms arise,

“ And bleeding wretches glut the troubled sea ;

“ Ev’n then—when death appears before my eyes,

“ My ev’ry thought, my love, shall fly to thee.

“ Should such a wretched hour my latest prove,

“ These the last words with parting breath I’ll cry ;

“ ‘ O save my LAURA, Heav’n ! O save my love !’

“ Then meet my angry fate, and freely die.

“ Yet grant, ye Gods, the only boon I crave,
 “ Tho’ storms arise and mountain billows roar,
 “ Alas ! in pity send some calmer wave
 “ To float me breathless to my native shore.

“ Then—when my wand’ring LAURA next shall flee
 “ To the green margin of the rising flood ;
 “ If then my lovely maid should chance to see
 “ My pale corpse sprinkled o’er with clotted blood ;

“ With flowing hair she’ll wipe the stains away,
 “ And when the last sad parting kiss is given,
 “ Adieu ! the lovely fair will fault’ring say,
 “ Lo ! ere to-morrow’s sun we’ll kiss in heaven !”

Whilst thus I painted wild the future scene,
 Lo ! our swift vessel from the shore had fled,
 And not a distant glimpse of land was seen,
 Save the blue top of some huge mountain’s head !

How soon, alas ! my coward-fears withdrew !—

I took another lover to my arms ;

I join'd the honest fury of the crew,

And LAURA'S yielded to BELLONA'S charms !

Yet—oh ! forgive me, thou delightful maid !

Nor try thy lover by too partial laws ;

When thou hast seen this noble tale display'd,

Let nature plead, and glory judge the cause.

Ere yet our squadron it's full course had run,

* Three snow-white signals sporting in the air,

And the deep thunder of a distant gun,

Proclaim'd our long-expected rivals near.

* *Three snow-white signals.*] The signal for an enemy's fleet is made by
loosing the three top-gallant sails, and firing a gun to leeward.

Now,

Now, swiftly bounding o'er each checquer'd shroud,
 The gallant youths in gath'ring swarms appear ;
 Soon the glad tidings are confirm'd aloud,
 Incessant rumours ring in every ear !

Thus if some wand'ring bee, the woods among,
 Near spring's first op'ning blossom chance to stray,
 Lur'd by his pleasing tale, the neighb'ring throng
 Cling to each bud, and hang on every spray.

Now nearer still the gallant squadrons drew,
 Loud shouts burst out, and bitter strains flew round ;
 Soon as in air the fatal signal flew,
 Strait the dire cannon sent a horrid sound !

With gath'ring force successive volleys roar'd,
 The doubling thunder in fresh fury broke ;
 From either side incessantly were pour'd
 Thick streams of fire, and clouds of rolling smoke !

Here,

Here, as a mighty vessel dauntless crouds,
 To brave the fury of the thickest war,
 A dreadful burst assaults the ecchoing clouds,
 And hurls her shiv'ring atoms into air!

Forth from her bowels issue floods of fire,
 That curl, and hiss, and sparkle as they rise;
 Whilst struggling heroes in the flames expire,
 Ascend in swarms, and darken all the skies!!

Her station long some gallant ship supply'd,
 And dealing death around, unshaken stood,
 'Till a huge volley pierc'd her op'ning side,
 And soon she sunk beneath the crimson flood!!

Swift fly the startled crew from instant death,
 Some frighted wretch ascends the faithless prow,
 One on the highest truck resigns his breath,
 Another breathes a shorter pray'r below!

Full many a ghastly group unheeded fell,
 And breathless floated on the purple wave ;
 The deep-ton'd cannon toll'd their dismal knell,
 The parting billow form'd their wat'ry grave !

The white-rob'd virgins on the neighb'ring strand,
 Where tides impetuous with fury drive,
 In solemn sadness form a mournful band,
 And frequent view some kindred corpse arrive.

Here, on her fav'rite hero, fate has slain,
 The fainting maiden soon resigns her breath ;
 She gazes wildly on the much-lov'd swain,
 Breathes her last sigh, and clasps him close in death !

Forth to a headless trunk two mourners run,
 The fatal object is by each deplor'd ;
 One fondly clasps it for her darling son,
 The other quickly owns it for her lord !

Yet ah!—why starts my ever-blooming maid?

Methinks I see thy lovely eyes o'erflow—

Thy beauteous cheeks with crimson are o'erspread,

Thy bosom heaves with sympathetic woe!

Enough!—my beauteous fair—thy tears prevail,

The dire description now I urge no more,

Here breaks the thread of my unhappy tale—

I'll yet resume it in some future hour.

Some future hour shall yet with pleasure smile,

When olive-peace succeeds to war's alarms;

When fortune shall reward my honest toil,

And yield, O heavenly prize! my LAURA's charms.

Then, sweetly seated in some green alcove,

Or slowly saunt'ring down the yellow vale,

Each sudden pause shall speak excessive love—

And frequent kisses interrupt my tale.